

**Friday's Feature**  
**By**  
**Theresa Friday**  
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**Scarlet hibiscus attracts hummingbirds to the garden**

Nothing will grab your attention quicker in the landscape than a brilliant red flower the size of a saucer. And one such eye-catching plant is the scarlet hibiscus, a Florida native. It is known botanically as *Hibiscus coccineus* and has many common names including Texas star hibiscus, marsh mallow and the scarlet rose mallow.

The scarlet hibiscus is a tall, slender, multi-trunked perennial that dies back in winter but reliably returns in spring. The plant is one of the taller perennials and can reach heights of four to six feet with a three to four foot spread. The leaves are deeply divided into five sharply pointed lobes. While the foliage is distinctive and attractive, the flowers are spectacular.

Scarlet, star-shaped flowers appear in mid to late summer. The flowers are five to six inches across with petals that don't overlap. Each lasts only a day but new ones continue to open all summer long. Of course, like all deep red flowers, they are extremely attractive to hummingbirds.



In the landscape, scarlet hibiscus can be used in borders, as an accent plant or in a rain garden.

Consider putting this hibiscus in the back of flower beds where its impressive flowers can appear over other summer flowering plants. Use this plant wherever you want to attract butterflies or hummingbirds.

This versatile native is equally at home in a swamp, marsh or submerged in a garden pool. In nature, it nearly always grows in very wet soils and can tolerate extended flooding. Established plants are moderately drought tolerant but will need to be watered during dry spells if you want them to flower.

When adding this plant to your landscape, choose a site with sun to part shade. After planting, apply a good layer of organic mulch to keep the soil evenly moist. Maintaining an appropriate mulch layer in the winter prevents root injury during

very cold temperatures. During winter expect this plant to freeze back. In the spring, prune the old stems back to the ground.

Many gardeners will think that because of its prolific flower production that the plant requires a lot of fertilizer. This is not the case. It will, however, benefit from small applications of a balanced fertilizer during the growing season.

The plant produces large seed pods in autumn with enough seeds to start many plants. It does help to lightly scrape the seed with sandpaper for better germination. It can also be propagated from cuttings or by division.

The scarlet hibiscus is one of the largest and most beautiful Florida native flowers and is a favorite of the ruby-throated hummingbird. To attract hummingbirds remember that tubular flowers that are both large and solitary or in loose drooping clusters are best. If you want to attract hummingbirds to your garden, this plant is a must.

**Tip of the Week:** Watch for yellowing leaves on your gardenias. This may be a sign of an iron deficiency, a common condition in sandy soil. Apply liquid iron or minor elements according to label directions.

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